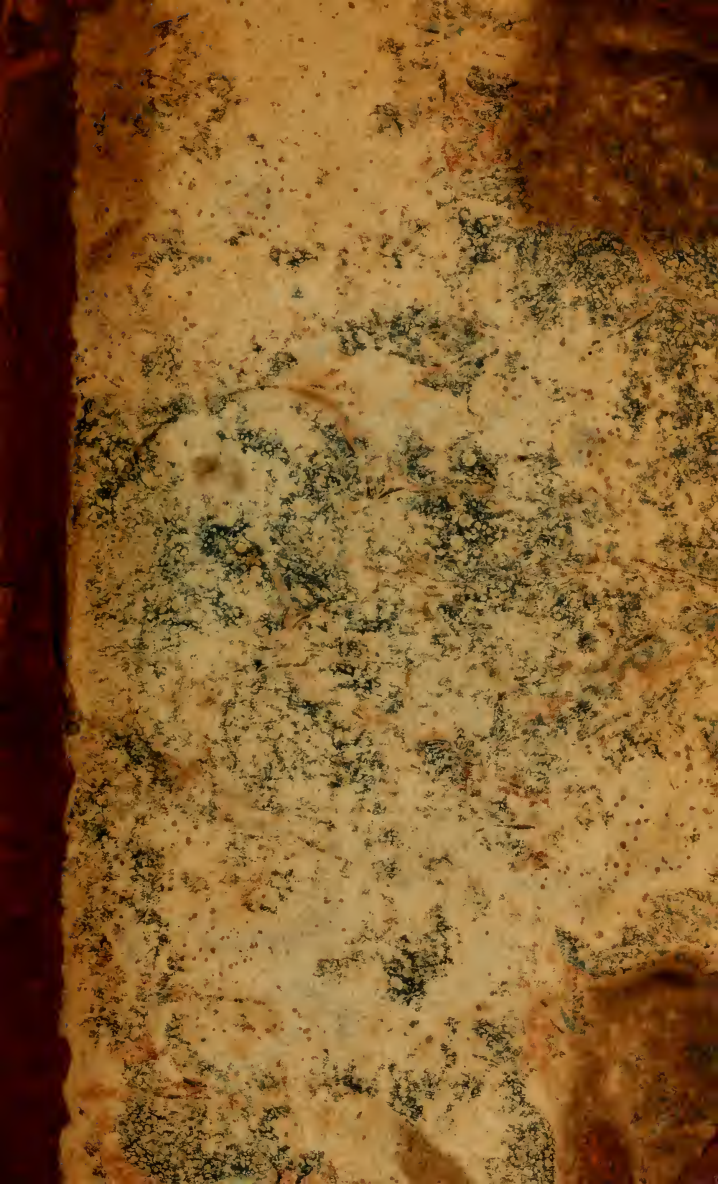

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MR. FRENCH'S

Occasional Discourse.

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT AN EVENING LECTURE,

IN THE

SOUTH MEETINGHOUSE,

IN PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

31 JULY, 1805.

IT BEING THE EVENING SUCCEEDING THE SESSION OF AN ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL CONVENED RESPECTING THE SEPARATION OF THE

REVEREND TIMOTHY ALDEN, JUNIOR,

FROM HIS PASTORAL RELATION TO THE SOUTH CHURCH AND CONGREGATION IN THAT TOWN.

BY THE REVEREND JONATHAN FRENCH, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE SOUTH CHURCH IN ANDOVER, MASS.

PORTSMOUTH, N. H.
PRINTED BY WILLIAM AND DANIEL TREADWELL,
1805.

REV. MR. FRENCH'S DISCOURSE.

ACTS XXI, XIV. THE WILL OF THE LORD BE DONE.

A PERFECT resignation to the will of GOD is the genuine nature, and final result, of the christian temper; and is essential to that spirit of Christ, without which we are none of his. Many are the occasions in life, which call for the aid and exertions of resignation, to support us under trials, and to carry us through sufferings with becoming fortitude. It is necessary in the discharge of various duties we owe to GOD and man. Among other things, the parting with dear christian friends requires the exertion of this important christian grace. Without this aid the trial would be almost insupportable. Such was the situation of the Apostle Paul and his christian friends, when he took leave of the elders of the Ephesian Church, at Miletus. Called in providence to attend to the important concerns of religion at Jerusalem, and for the greater enlargement of his usefulness in the christian Church, Paul takes his leave of them, to which they consented with the greatest reluctance. He takes leave in the most affectionate manner, reminding them, that in faithfulness and with tears he had served them, and had kept back nothing that was profitable to them. And now he must leave them. The thoughts were grievous to them, to whom he had preached the word of life, and under whose ministry, they had been savingly enlightened, instructed and comforted. But what added most to their affliction, and gave a keen edge to all their griefs, was the prediction, that after he should leave them, grievous wolves would enter in among them not sparing the flock; and that they, among whom he had been preaching the kingdom of GOD, should see his face no more! They wept, they fell upon his neck and kissed him. But Providence called, and he must obey. In the most melting and affectionate manner, I commend you to GOD, said he, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

ON

On his way, Paul and a number of christian friends with him, visited Philip the Evangelist ; and tarried with him some time. While there, the prophet Agabus foretold the troubles that Paul would meet with at Jarusalem. For although he was about to leave them, he was not about to leave trouble. Upon this, his companions and the people of Cæsarea, considering his ease and comfort, rather than the cause, in which he was engaged, intreated the Apostle with tears not to leave them. Their love for this dear servant of Christ, their concern for his safety and happiness, and the painful thought of parting with him, excited the warmest solicitations that he would not go to Jerusalem. The pleasure he felt at the prospect of ease and comfort among them ; contrasted with the labors and dangers, which presented to his view upon his leaving them ; and the deep affliction, and overflowing tenderness expressed for him, wrung his soul with distress, and his heart was ready to burst within him. What mean ye to weep, said he, and to break mine heart ? But, fully persuaded it was the call of Providence, he declared his willingness to suffer, and even to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they saw he would not be persuaded, they ceased their importunity, and with an holy resignation, as became the true disciples of Christ, they cried out, as in the text. *The will of the Lord be done.*

These words naturally lead to the consideration of the great christian duty of resignation to the will of God, which viewed in all its lights, opens a larger field for discussion, than the present time and circumstances will admit. What is purposed therefore is only in brief to attend,

1. To a few things, which are implied in resignation to the will of God, and,

2. To suggest a few things, by which it may appear, that resignation to the will of God is the duty of christians at all times.

1. Then we hope it will not be time unprofitably spent to consider a few things which are implied in resignation to the will of God. Among the many things implied in this duty, we may mention a likeness to Christ in heart and affection, as of primary consideration. It supposes the will to be bowed, and brought under subjection to Jesus Christ. The hearts and wills of mankind are naturally hard, selfish and obstinate ; but resignation to the will of God supposes the heart to be changed and softened, the will to be bowed, the temper meliorated, and brought into a beautiful conformity, and sweet subjection to

Jesus

Jesus Christ through the power of the divine spirit and instrumentality of the means of grace. The spirit of Christ has then taken residence in the heart. If we have arrived at this, the same spirit dwells in us, that dwelt in Christ Jesus; and it is become our meat and drink to do the will of our Father in heaven.

2. RESIGNATION to the will of GOD implies a full belief in the wisdom and perfection of the divine government; that GOD in his holy providence rules over all things, and orders all things according to the counsel of his own will, in the wisest and best manner. The divine government extends so minutely overall the works of GOD's hands, that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice; and by him the hairs of our heads are all numbered. No event ever did, or can, or will take place in the universe without his knowledge, and without his commissive or permissive will. As the whole universe is within the limits of his government, so he will ever act with infinite wisdom, and overrule all things for his own glory and the final good of his church. He hath given an unfailing promise, that all things shall work together for good to them, who love him. Whatever kind or degree of difficulty the children of GOD may be called to wade through in this life; however dark or distressing the prospects before them may at any time appear; an holy resignation, with an entire confidence in the wisdom of divine government will say, *the will of the Lord be done.*

3. RESIGNATION implies a ready compliance with duty of whatever kind or nature. They who are of this blessed temper will never dispute the divine will in any thing. They may indeed in many important instances be at a loss to know what is duty. But whenever this is the case, the door is open to seek direction. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of GOD, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. The children of GOD, under the influence of the spirit of Christ, will be solicitious to know their duty, and will spare no pains in a proper manner to find it out. In the name of Jesus they will pray, Lord, what we know not teach thou us; Lord, what will thou have us to do? And having in the best manner they could arrived at a satisfactory knowledge of their duty, they never hesitate to perform it.

4. TRUE resignation to the will of GOD implies a readiness to relinquish our own private worldly interests and every earthly comfort, however near or dear to us, if called to it for the glory of GOD and the

the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom.* When Providence calls nothing should be withheld. Temporal interests, and worldly sinister views should never constrain us to withhold any thing from GOD, which he calls for. The believer indeed has no interest separate from Christ; for the interest of Christ and of believers is one.

TRUE resignation also implies great self denial. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross and follow me. All temporal interest and comfort, and even life itself must be given up at the call of Christ. Whosoever will save his life, rather than part with it for Christ, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, saith Christ, shall find it. In a word, resignation to the will of God implies an acquiescence in divine Providence, a cheerfulness in doing his will, and readiness to suffer for his sake, saying, as the holy brethren did, when parting with their dearly beloved Apostle, *the will of the Lord be done.*

HAVING thus mentioned a few things implied in true resignation to the will of God, I would now,

2. Suggest a few things, by which it may appear, that resignation to the will of GOD is the duty of christians at all times. Many things might be suggested to show this to be a duty, but circumstances will permit me to mention the following only, as,

1. GOD is the author of our beings, and all we have or enjoy are from him. We are his by creation, preservation and redemption; and ought therefore to glorify him in our bodies and spirits which are his, by an entire and unreserved resignation to his will.

2. GOD's government and providence, and all his dealings and dispensations toward us are perfectly right and infinitely wise. These considerations ought ever to compose the mind, and, and cause it to rest in GOD with a holy resignation to his will.

3. THAT GOD designs the greatest happiness of his church, in all his providences towards it, shows it to be the duty of his children to be resigned to him. GOD is love. He is lovely in himself, lovely in his laws and in all his ways; and ought therefore to be loved by all his creatures in such a manner, as shall lead them to take delight in his will, and to be resigned to it in all things. This is a duty in times of the deepest affliction as well as in the days of prosperity. There is no difficulty in feeling resigned to GOD, when we are in easy circumstances

* *See a note at the end of this discourse, page* 14.

stances and our condition is flourishing. But when reduced to straits and difficulties; when clouds of adversity hang heavily over us; when called to distressful selfdenying scenes; and to part with mercies, which we greatly set our hearts and affections upon; then is the time to try our christian graces, and to put our resignation to the test. Happy they, who at such a time can bow submissive, and say, *the will of the Lord be done.*

THIS duty may be exemplified by reciting a few of the many instances recorded in the sacred scriptures for our instruction. When Aaron, in a sudden and awful manner, was called to part with his sons, *he held his peace.* Not a murmuring word escaped his lips. When the most awful judgment was denounced against the house of Eli, by the mouth of the prophet, with a calm resignation Eli replied, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* When David was treated in the most perfidious manner by wicked Hanun, and the Ammonites and Assyrians combined to destroy him, David encouraged his people and said, let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our GOD: *and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.* At another time, when flying from his unnatural son Absalom, the Priests and the Levites being with David bearing the ark of the covenant of GOD; the king commanded, saying, carry back the ark of GOD into the city: If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back again, and show me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. Job was another remarkable instance. He was bereft of every thing. The Sabeans seized upon his cattle, and slew his servants with the edge of the sword. Fire from heaven killed his sheep, and the servants, who attended them. The Chaldeans carried away his camels, and slew the servants. A whirlwind destroyed his house, which in falling killed all his sons and daughters. Under these complicated, and unparalleled bereavements, see the power of resignation. He fell upon the ground and worshiping, said, naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. But the most remarkable instance of resignation among all examples recorded in the old testament is perhaps that of Abraham's offering up his son Isaac. Abraham was not merely required to relinquish his

society, and the aid and assistance, which an aged father expected from him. He was not about to part with him that he might go into some distant country, no more to return; nor was he to be taken from him by sickness, nor a natural death. These circumstances would have been afflicting. They would have excited all the tender passions and every human feeling; and nature would have been reluctant at the thought. But Abraham must part with his Son, in a manner as much more trying and distressful, as we can conceive. Take now thy Son, thine only Son, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, said the Almighty, and offer him there for a burnt offering. Isaac was no doubt an agreeable person, a pleasant child. He might have possessed every qualification to flatter the hopes, and raise the expectations of a fond father. Abraham was no doubt as affectionate a father, as was ever blessed with so dear and dutiful a son. This was not all. Isaac was a son of the promise. All the blessings of the new covenant to him and his seed were expected from the Messiah through this Son. Moreover, he was himself to be the executioner of the divine command and to sacrifice his Son with his own hand. All these circumstances combined, exhibited a scene as self-denying and affecting, as any, of which we have read or heard. But Abraham possessed a resignation to GOD that overcame every selfish passion and every sinister motive. Abraham laid upon Isaac the wood for the burnt offering, and took the fire and the knife in his hand, and both went on together. As they passed along, Isaac ignorant of the design, called to his father saying, my Father, and he said, here am I, my Son. Behold, said he, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering? He little suspected that he was to be the lamb. What must Abraham have felt at this innocent affecting question? Abraham replied, as soon as he could reply, concealing as much as possible the emotion of his soul. My Son, GOD will provide himself a lamb. When they came to the place of destination, Abraham built an altar, and laid the wood in order. Now the trying dreadful scene approaches. The time is come! All the strength of faith, self-denial, fortitude and resignation are called for. Abraham shrank not from the task. He took his Son, his tender, his pleasant, his dearly beloved Son, and bound him with his own hands, laid upon the wood, and O the power of faith, stretched forth his hand, took the knife, and was

just

just ready to give the fatal stroke, when, O the infinite wisdom and mercy of GOD! At the critical moment, an angel called to him out of heaven, saying, Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest GOD; seeing thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine only Son from me! How did GOD smile upon Abraham's faith and resignation! By myself have I sworn saith the Lord, that in blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: because thou hast obeyed my voice.

BUT the greatest example of resignation ever exhibited before the universe was that of the blessed JESUS, who spared not his own life, but gave it up to make that sacrifice for sin, which was typified by the sacrifice required of Abraham. The sufferings before him were so great, that at the anticipation of them, he sweat as it were drops of blood falling down upon the ground. They extorted from him this petition, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But mark his resignation. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt; not my will, but thine be done. Father, glorify thy name. Greater love than this, said he, hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend. This is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you. How did the blessed Apostles and disciples of Jesus obey his precepts and follow his examples. They exercised the most unfeigned resignation to the divine will. They gave up all, and did not withhold even their own lives, when the glory of God called for them. What a resigned temper did the brethren show when called to part with their beloved friend, whose face they never expected to see again? Notwithstanding the distress of parting and the melancholy prospects, which were before both him and them they calmed their minds, put their trust in GOD, and resigned him, saying, *the will of the Lord be done.*

WHAT an holy and entire resignation to the will of GOD should we exercise and exhibit, who have such numerous precepts, such bright examples, and such weighty arguments, placed before us in GOD's word. May we at all times even under the most afflictive providences consider, that we have no interest separate from Christ's. We have no interest in the universe but what is involved in the glory of GOD and the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. Let us at all times be ready

to

to resign every thing to GOD and withhold nothing, which his providence and the intesest of the Redeemer's kingdom call for.

PERHAPS it may be expected that something more particular may be said, with respect to the present occasion. But this has been in a great measure superseded by the result of council, hereafter to be communicated. Other considerations may also render it improper. The speaker is too great a stranger to the number and abilities, to the moral and religious state of this church and people, to be able to say much correctly concerning them. You will permit me however to observe that you are, perhaps too readily, about to part with an able, learned, and I trust faithful, minister of Christ in a difficult day, a day when schismatics and sectarians swarm through the country. The adversary of souls as a roaring lion seeks, whom he may devour. Dissipation, laxity of sentiments and discipline, of morality and of pure and undefiled religion are prevalent. Infidelity, disregard to the gospel and its institutions, profanity, intemperance, and numerous other vices are increasing. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxen cold. At this critical time you are about to be rendered destitute of a stated ministry of the blessed word and ordinances of the gospel. How much will the aged, the sick, the infirm, and others, need the counsel and sympathy of a faithful minister! How much will the young need the warnings and instructions of a spiritual guide? How much will you need a wise and watchful shepherd to take care of the sheep and the lambs; lest grievous wolves should enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Under all these difficulties, you cannot be benefited by the public labors of your aged, venerable and beloved senior pastor, by reason of his years and infirmity. Is it not to be feared and apprehended, that you are not fully sensible of your situation? The thought is painful, I shall not pursue it. May you be prospered. May you be enabled and disposed to a resettlement of the ministry, and to afford an honorable support to the gospel.

MAY the comforts of GOD be the support of your aged senior pastor, the residue of his days; and when his sun of life shall sit, may it go down with a smile; may he then be admitted to the rewards of a faithful servant in the kingdom of GOD.

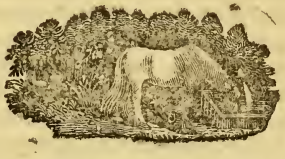
MAY the blessings of him, who will never leave nor forsake them, who trust in him, rest upon your worthy junior pastor and his family.

May

May GOD ALMIGHTY long delight in his life, make his usefulness in this world eminent, and reward him with glory, and honor, and eternal life in the world to come.

WE commend you of this church and congregation to GOD and to the word of his grace, who is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified, through Jesus Christ. To him be glory and praise forever.

AMEN.



NOTE.

* Some have carried this matter so far, as to suppose that a man cannot be a good man, or have any true love for God, unless he should feel himself willing to be damned, and cast off forever, if God's glory should require it. Strange idea! Yet some fancy this sentiment is expressed or implied in scripture, in the cases of Moses, and of Paul. But they, who think so, must in my opinion have greatly mistaken the sense both of Moses and of Paul. "We injure the character of Moses much, if we think him either so ignorant of a future state, or so negligent of his own salvation, as to wish himself damned in his deprecation of God's judgments for their salvation." The case of Moses was this. When God threatened to destroy the Israelites for their sin in worshiping a molten calf, Moses prays. Exod. xxxii, 32. O this people have sinned a great sin; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sins, if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book, which thou hast written." It was the antient custom of the Jews to register the names of the people in a book. Those whose names were thus registered were said, Isaiah iv. 3. to be written for life, or among the living; and when any one died, they blotted his name out this book. Now such was the great concern and love of Moses for the people, that he had rather God would take away his life, or blot his name from the register of the living, than to spare him to witness so great a calamity, as the execution of God's threatened judgment against them. But as to wishing himself damned, I do not believe the thought entered his heart. He was too well acquainted with the will of God to utter or even conceive such an idea.

The other instance alluded to is in Rom. ix. 3. where the Apostle Paul, expressing his vehement desire for the salvation of the Jews, says, I could wish myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. I shall not go into a detail of the various interpretations of this text. I shall only observe that it is clear in my mind, that Paul here spake in that well known figure, often made use of in scripture, called *hyperbole*. I would mention a few instances of this. It is said there were seven thousand Benjamites every one of whom could sling a stone at an hair and not miss. That is they were men of great skill in the use of the sling. Saul and Jonathan were

said

said to be swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions. The meaning is they were men of great strength and agility. The Lord said to the Israelites, they should go over Jordan, and possess cities fenced up to heaven, i. e. whose walls were very high. Describing the sailors in a storm, says the Psalmist, they mount up to heaven, and then go down again to the depths ; meaning that waves ran exceedingly high. John says that if all that Jesus did were written, the world would not contain the books. The meaning is, if all Jesus said and did were written they would fill many volumes. I take the words of Paul in this famous text to be no other than an elegant divine hyperbole, designed to show the ardor of his desire for the salvation of the Jews. But Moses and Paul too well knew, that their eternal destruction could not affect the salvation of the Jews, ever to entertain such a wish. We therefore conclude that those two great and inspired men never meant to convey such an idea.

I will add farther, I do not believe that any man, who understands, and considers the true import of the phrase, can or will dare to say, he is willing to be damned from a real sense of love to GOD, and resignation to his will. This would be as much as to say, I have such an ardent love for GOD, that to promote his glory, I am willing to become his eternal enemy. I am willing to become like devils and damned spirits, and with them to lie down in hell and blaspheme GOD, and do all that a damned spirit can do, to oppose his will, his kingdom and glory to all eternity! The thought is horrid! It is almost enough to make the blood chill in the veins ! But it will be said perhaps, we do not mean so, we mean only that *if* it were the will of GOD; that *if* his glory required, then a good man must be willing to be and to do all this. It is replied that this is neither logical nor theological. I therefore deny the hypothesis, and say, it is not a supposable case ; for it is solemnly declared, that he who believeth in Jesus shall be saved. It is therefore no part of christian resignation, that any person, who truly loves GOD, should be willing to be damned.

FINIS.